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PRESS RELEASE

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IDENTITY THEFT “SWEEP”

Terrell L. Harris, United States Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee, today announced the indictment and/or guilty plea of 30 individuals for identity theft, as part of a nation wide “sweep.” Information pertaining to those individuals in our district is attached to this release.

“The success of our efforts is the result of close and continuing cooperation between many law enforcement agencies including the United States Secret Service, the Postal Inspection Service, the FBI, the Office of Inspector General of the Social Security Administration, the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, and the Federal Trade Commission, as well as state and local law enforcement agencies,” said U.S. Attorney Harris.

Attorney General John Ashcroft announced the results of the nation wide sweep at an afternoon news conference in Washington, D.C.

“Identity theft is often an essential component of many criminal activities, from bank and credit-card fraud to – as we learned last fall in the aftermath of September 11 attacks – international terrorism,” Ashcroft said. “The types of criminal violations that underlie the identity thefts in these cases run the gamut from traditional white-collar crime to murder.”

The Justice Department brought 62 criminal prosecutions against 122

individuals in 25 districts.

Identity theft is one of the fastest-growing crimes in the United States. The Federal Trade Commission, which maintains a national database of consumer complaints known as Consumer Sentinel, recently reported that in calendar year 2001, identity theft accounted for 42 percent of all complaints that it received—more than any other category of consumer fraud.

In addition, the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse has estimated that between 500,000 and 700,000 people each year become victims of identity theft.

Since Congress added the identity theft offense to the identification fraud statute in October 1998, the Department of Justice has filed 2,223 criminal cases against 2,899 defendants for all violations of section 1028 of the statute, including identity theft.

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